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FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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TAGS: SCUL ETRD SENV SOCI PGOV CJAN UNESCO
SUBJECT: UNESCO: INTANGIBLE HERITAGE CONVENTION:
CHALLENGES FOR USG POLICY GOALS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The UNESCO Intangible Heritage
Convention (IHC), which is designed to ensure the
safeguarding of the international cultural heritage,
will likely enter into force mid-2006. After that, IHC
Member States will establish "Operational Guidelines"
that will set the basis for the creation of a
"Representative List of International Cultural
Heritage" and a separate list of "Heritage in Need of
Urgent Safeguarding."

Despite the obvious possibilities for conflicts, there
was no detailed discussion of balancing "safeguarding"
and other priorities, such as trade or development, at
a 8-9 December Experts Group meeting.

The IHC will replace UNESCO's annual "Masterpieces of
Oral Traditions" awards, which caused criticism and
hurt national feelings following the Nov 25 rejection
of the Spanish application for flamenco dancing. End
summary.

¶2. (U) The IHC has been ratified by 27 out of the 30
countries necessary for entry into force. See para.
¶11. Intangible Heritage Sector Chief Rieks Smits told
poloff 9 December that several additional countries are
"far along" in the ratification process. He expects
entry into force no later than mid-2006.

¶3. (U) The goal of the IHC is to protect intangible
cultural heritage, in a manner similar to that used to
protect physical sites under UNESCO's flagship
Convention, 1972 World Heritage Convention. (Note.
There are now 822 World Heritage Sites. End note.)
When the IHC goes into effect, Member States will
prepare national inventories of intangible cultural
heritage. An Intergovernmental Committee, chosen from
among Member States, will pass on Member State
applications to include specified traditions on the
"Representative list of International Cultural
Heritage." The Committee will also draw up a List of
International Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent
Safeguarding."

¶4. (SBU) So far, most of the ratifying states are from
the developing world (see para. 11), with some notable
exceptions. UNESCO observers fear that these developing
states might not be able to provide the necessary
wherewithal and focus to craft comprehensive and
workable Operational Guidelines for the IHC. (Note.
Implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention is
dependent on the application of voluminous, detailed
and carefully crafted Operational Guidelines. End
note.)

¶5. (SBU) The Operational Guidelines will likely address
very difficult topics, such as how to balance
safeguarding intangible heritage with development and
will require calm, considered deliberation. The IHC
provides for application of the principles of
sustainable development, but this obviously requires
further definition. A UNESCO Experts' Group met 8-9
December, apparently to start the thinking process
going. (Comment. The UNESCO professional in charge of
the IHC, a hardworking accomplished academic, seems to
appreciate the difficulty of these issues and to want
to see them discussed thoroughly and openly. End
comment.)

¶6. (U) The Experts recommended that the Guidelines
specify that all traditions included on the
Representative list must be consistent with widely
accepted international human rights norms. (Note. As
a UNESCO specialist remarked, this would likely
eliminate well more than half of the world's cultural
traditions. End note.) The group also recommended
that the tradition included on the Representative List
should be passed from generation to generation, still
living and part of the life of the community, and that
a plan exists to safeguard the tradition. The written
recommendations on these points are expected to be
ready mid-January 2006.

¶7. (U) UNESCO's Masterpiece of Oral Tradition awards
will end when the IHC goes into force next year. The
"masterpieces" will be folded into the IHC
representative list.   Further background on the
"Masterpiece" program and the IHC can be found at:
http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=16429&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201. html

¶8. (SBU) Many criticized the "Masterpieces" announced
at a 25 November UNESCO ceremony as geographically too
limited and esoteric and not representing real, live
culture. The Spanish application for flamenco dancing
was rejected, as was the Argentinean application for
tango dancing two years ago. The Mexican application
for its national cuisine also did not get the nod.

¶9. (SBU) UNESCO insiders declined to share their
understanding's of the jury's reasoning in making the
awards, but it appears that "endangered" traditions,
especially those which have remained unchanged for many
generations, are favored.

¶10. (SBU) The rejection of the Spanish application for
flamenco dancing brought forth strong national feelings
from some UNESCO Spanish staff. One highly placed
Spaniard on UNESCO's staff told poloff Nov 29 that
while there is disappointment when a site x or y in a
country does not get World Heritage Site status, there
is something close to anger when UNESCO tells a
country, in effect, that its national traditions don't
make the grade.

¶11. (U) Countries who have ratified the IHC IN order of
ratification):

Algeria
Mauritius
Japan
Gabon
Panama
China
Central African Republic
Latvia
Lithuania
Belarus
Republic of Korea
Seychelles
Syrian Arab Republic
United Arab Emirates
Mail
Mongolia
Croatia
Egypt
Oman
Dominica
India
Viet Nam
Peru
Pakistan
Bhutan
Nigeria
Iceland

¶12. (SBU) Comment. The IHC will likely soon go into
force. We will likely want to talk to our partners
(see above) about crafting Operational Guidelines that
do not allow the important purposes of the IHC to be
lost because they have been subsumed in the loud
"globalization" arguments.

KOSS